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Feminism In Toni Morrison's *Sula* And Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm In Chandigarh***Vijay D.Songire,**Assistant Professor,
SIES Graduate School of Technology,
Nerul, Navi Mumbai.**Dr. Subhash P. Zanake,**Head, Department of English,
Arts, Science and P.O. Nahata Commerce college,
Bhusawal, Dist. Jalgaon.**Abstract:**

*Toni Morrison one of the most prestigious women writers on the canon of African American literature and the winner of the Nobel Prize deals with the various issues of race, class and gender exploitation in white dominated America. On the other hand, Nayantara Sahgal is a significant voice in the tradition of women writers in Indian Writing in English. Both Morrison and Sahgal have some similarities as well as dissimilarities in their works. The present paper investigates into the portrayal of feminism in their respective work. The paper particularly makes a comparative study of Morrison's *Sula* and Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* and shows that how both of the writers are similar in their portrayal of feminism.*

Key Words: Male patriarchy, marital relationship, conflict, feminism, individuality, etc.

Iftikhar Hussain remarks: "Feminism in general can be seen as collective and individual endeavor on the part of women at different times and in different countries to strive for equality of rights and opportunities in all walks of life." (01) Feminism is a movement that takes a strong stand for women's rights. The history of feminism deals with the modern western feminist movement which is divided into three phases/waves. The first one is called women suffrage movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the UK and US, it focused on the promotion of equal contract, marriage, parenting, and property rights for women. By the end of the 19th century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of vote. The second phase is called as women's liberation movement which began in 1960s. This phase highlighted the need for social equality for women. The third wave is a continuation of the second phase.

Both Morrison and Sahgal's respective works stand for feminism which highlight the need of women's rights and expose the social reality in the society. Toni Morrison pens the sufferings and humiliation of the blacks in general and black women in particular. She has given voice to the voiceless in her novels. She gives vigor to the lost self of black women. As Kavita Arya writes: "Toni Morrison sets out in her novels to recover the African American female self, which is mutilated, fragmented or blotted out." (41) Morrison is the only African American woman writer who has portrayed the rising female consciousness in her celebrated novel *Sula*. She tries to paint the character of the female protagonist namely Sula to open up new avenues for the coming generation of black women. The black women who have long been suffered and humiliated due to racism, classism and sexism stand erect against the male tyranny in *Sula*.

Similarly, Nayantara Sahgal portrays the predicament of Indian women under the heavy burden of male patriarchy. She is similarly a feminist like Morrison in her depiction of female characters in her novels. Her fictional world is female oriented like Morrison's. As M. Selvanayagi writes: "Sahgal is the most thorough going feminist among the women writers of Indian English fiction." (276)

Morrison portrays the women characters like Eva, Hannah and Sula who break the social norms. Being mothers Eva and Hannah are the women who do not follow the conventions as well as the social norms of the society. Following the footprints of her mother, Sula too behaves in the unconventional manner. She breaks all the rules that reflect the community's traditional values. She becomes a pariah in her own community leaving outside the laws and codes of the community. Sula is rebellious woman in several ways. She rejects the ideology of other medallion women. She is not interested in getting married and to settle down. She does not accept the role of a woman just as a homemaker and limited for a family. She lives out her own fantasies and creates her own realities. She is very possessive to set her own personal objectives. As she confesses to her close friend Nel "I got my mind and what goes on in it." (43) Morrison has portrayed the character of Nel as a woman who follows the social codes and conducts of the society. Nel represents those African American women who are suffered under the name of marriage and motherhood. On the contrary, Sula represents a woman who rejects traditional notions of family, marriage, babies and grand parental care. Her life shows her negatives attitudes towards the notions of feminine responsibility. Her grandmother Eva who is the ultimate follower of patriarchy wants Sula to follow the social norms. "When you gonna get married? You need to have babies. It'll settle you..." (92) But on the contrary, Sula does not want to settle down. She revolts against such subordination of woman, saying: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself." (92) She refuses to see women as only wives and mothers. Morrison puts forth the African American women's struggle for individual freedom. After the death of her husband, Eva takes all the responsibility of the house and asserts herself. Her character is also one of the most significant characters that show the awakening female consciousness. Eva Peace has to shelter her daughter Hannah when she loses her husband Rekus as well as Plum when he returns from the war. She is a caretaker of the family. Mohini Chakranarayan rightly observes about her: "Eva can be called the ideal of the archetypal great mother." (66) She has a nice combination of understanding of the traditions as well as the ability to flout them when situation demands. She echoes in the character of Sula who too like her has the spirit to face the obstacles in life individually. Sula is considered as evil on the account of her relationship with white men. However, she stands erect against the all odds. When her friend Nel condemns her for her act of betrayal by sleeping with her husband she does not regret. However she says: "What you mean take him away? I did not kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you could not get over it?" (145) Thus, both Eva and Sula assert themselves in their own way. As Chakranarayan says: "Eva Peace and Sula Peace can be named as crusaders who tried to prove that women can manage their own affairs independently without the support of men and yet remain desirable for men." (107) Similarly Sahgal's Saroj and Mara in *Storm in Chandigarh* are the individualistic

characters. Mara even criticizes Inder when he talks ill about his wife Saroj. She lives an independent life. Saroj believes in marital bonding and respects her husband. However she finds herself completely helpless in front of her husband's tyrannical behaviour. Sahgal's Saroj and Morrison's Sula are similar to some extent. Both of them are in search of individuality and independence.

Individual freedom is actually a primary focus of Morrison's *Sula* and Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*. Morrison's women want to emancipate themselves from all kind of bondages in the society. Sahgal's Saroj too like Morrison's Sula and Eva tries to discover her own self. She rejects the values and social norms those are imposed upon her by the traditional society. She gets attracted towards one of the males namely Vishal, one of the males in the novel. She has a desire to live her own life as if Sula of Morrison's. She finds solace from all tensions in the company of Vishal. Both Morrison's Sula and Sahgal's Saroj are similar in their yearning for man's love. Sula seeks the company of Ajax. Even she enjoys love making with him. Morrison has portrayed the sexual relationship of Sula with Ajax, her lover very boldly. It reflects the changing image of African American woman who is now ready to shatter all the bondages of patriarchal society. Both Sula and Saroj being unmarried are the appealing characters who are the true examples of female consciousness. Saroj, being honest confesses her pre-marital affair to her husband which shows her as a modern woman. Morrison writes about Sula's attempt to fulfill her sexual desire in her own way. As she writes about Sula: "...she focused her thoughts to bar the creeping disorder that was flooding her hips. She looked down; down from what seemed an awful height at the head of the man whose lemon-yellow gabardines had been the first sexual excitement she'd known." (130)

Sahgal becomes a spokesperson for women's right in her *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969). The novel depicts different shades of marital relationship on the ground of patriarchal set up in Indian society. Sahgal has advocated the rights of women in this novel. She speaks for women's freedom and empowerment. She is very well portrayed the changing psyche of Indian modern women in her novels. She has flawlessly exposed the hypocrisy of Indian marriages where woman is just like a slave. Once she enters into the bond of marriage her freedom is lost. Her women characters try to break the limitations imposed upon them by the convention of marriage because suffer throughout under its pressure. She skillfully shows how woman's life is meaningless due to male patriarchy. Males just look at women as a means for sensual pleasure and there is no genuine emotional involvement between man and woman.

Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* presents conflict between the traditions and modernity that takes place in the capital Chandigarh, of two states Punjab and Haryana. The characters in the novel have accepted modern culture but at the same time they follow their traditions. This mixture of modernity and traditions has affected the attitude of the people. Therefore, Chandigarh, has emerged as a new kind of city where people have brought their beliefs, ideas and customs with them. The mixture of two culture that is Western and Indian has created a sense of confusion among the people of the town. Women characters are definitely affected with the idea of modernity and they are ready to throw the ideals put forth

by the ancient traditions. They seek freedom and don't want to remain confined within the four walls of their houses.

As Bolla Rao and Bolla Ramkrishna assert: "Women characters in this novel no more like to remain confined within the four walls of their houses. They prefer to go to picnic and parties to relieve the burden of boredom and monotony." (529) *Storm in Chandigarh* pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness." It deals with complex human relationships in which love, friendship, honesty, freedom and equality play a vital role. The 'storm' in the lives of three married couples, Inder and Saroj, Jit and Mira and Vishal and Leela is portrayed against the political backdrop of storm or confrontation between the newly divided states of the Punjab and Haryana over the issue of Chandigarh. The characters in the novel behave like moderns and at the same time do not isolate themselves completely from the tradition. This blend of tradition and modernity can be observed in their attitude to love, morality, education, man woman relations and even architecture. In the novel, *Storm In Chandigarh*, Saroj is married to Inder, who runs the textile mills of Saroj's cousin Nikhil Ray's company in Chandigarh. There is no emotional communion between them, inspite of their four year married life with two children. She represents the new woman who is trying to retain her individuality and breathe freely in the suffocating atmosphere of passionless and unfulfilling marriages and to live in self respect. She is an open-minded person who even discloses her pre-marital affair to her husband, Inder. She wants to establish her marital relationship with values like mutual trust, consideration, communication and absence of any pretence. It is her honest confession about her relationship in past which takes a bad toll on her marriage. Inder, a typical patriarch tortures her mentally and physically after her confession. As Modepalli Naidu writes: "The double standards of patriarchal morality are visible from the fact that Inder who wants to make Saroj feel 'ashamed' of her pre-marital affair, himself has many sexual experiences before marriage. But women have no right to question male promiscuity or indulge in practices which are considered to be male prerogatives." (412) The attitude of people towards woman is that they always want a woman pure and virgin before marriage. After marriage too her physical relationship has to be limited for her husband only. If not she faces the worst consequences of her supposed relationship. Saroj faces a tragic citation on the account of her breaking the social norms of marriage where a woman is supposed to have physical relationship with her husband only.

Inder's attitude towards her has always been of disgust due to her act of pre-marital relationship. He is not able to adjust with this and therefore treats her with anger and revenge. On the other hand, in spite of all this torture and tormentation, Saroj has never let her inner strength, her pride and her self esteem get completely violated. "Even in extremity, she had never said, 'Forgive me'. For each time she had lived through a night's torment, she could wake to the sunlight and find herself unsullied in it." (94) In Saroj Sahgal has portrayed a woman who tries to adjust and compromise with her husband in order to live a successful married life. She feels herself responsible for the failure of marriage. "A yearning to reach Inder possessed her, stirring a desire she recognized as old and unfulfilled. She wanted to love him in

unpermitted ways, to make love to his doubts and dreams, to the private worlds within him that were locked and barred from her." (200) However her efforts are useless. Eventually she fills up the emotional void in her friendship with Vishal one of the male characters in the novel who understands her value. He is a man who faced emotional estrangement in his relationship with his wife, Leela who did not understand him. She died six years back. Both Vishal and Saroj who believe in mutual understanding and trust in marital relationship start taking interest in each other. Saroj realizes that she can no longer submit to the injustice and brutalities of her husband, Inder. She does not want to stay with Inder and leaves the home. She accepts Vishal as her true companion. At the end Saroj set a good example for women who blindly follow the age-old marriage institution. She revolts and stands for her own individual rights of freedom and equality. She is decisive and leaves her husband for better prospects in life. As Modepalli Naidu rightly remarks: "Saroj revolts against the established norms by leaving a marriage that had become an emotional wasteland for her. Thus Saroj's departure from her home is an initiation towards personal freedom of the new woman. Her courage is her virtue and she asserts her individuality. Saroj, no doubt, is the embodiment of Nayanantara's own vision of virtuous woman. (413)

Both Morrison and Sahgal have shown in the respective novels that how marriage and motherhood limit women's existence. In *Sula* Eva, Hannah and Nel are the victims of the age old custom of male patriarchy. They do not get man's love throughout their life. Nel is a woman who believes in marriage and motherhood. She does not even imagine about sex without her husband, Jude. Unfortunately, Jude betrays her by sleeping with her close friend, Sula. Therefore, Morrison develops the character like Sula who flouts this age-old ideology of marriage that crushed women's freedom and individuality. Sula stands for the tenets of feminism which believes in freedom and equality for women. Dr Syed Mujahid aptly writes about the novel: "Sula is not only a positive image of black woman but she also symbolizes a universally positive image of womanhood. She is a powerful character portrayal by Toni Morrison, which is filled with feminine consciousness. Her portrayal raises a kind of consciousness in black women. Sula, through her caliber rejects the male dominated white cultural norms." (94) Sahgal too successfully paves a new platform for women who are victimized on the account of male patriarchy. She brings the victims like Saroj to limelight that eventually revolts against the male tyrannical culture. Both Morrison and Sahgal being feminists truly document the painful sufferings of women under the heavy pressure of social conventions in the respective novels. They not only raise their voice against gender discrimination but also show women's ability to define themselves.

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